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TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [PA](#) [BR](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: PPL MEMBERS INDICTED FOR KIDNAPPING AS LAND
DISPUTES HEAT UP

REF: A. 06 ASUN 1208
[1](#)B. ASUN 181

Classified By: DCM Michael J. Fitzpatrick for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Paraguayan authorities indicted former Free Fatherland Party (PPL) members Manuel Cristaldo Mieres and Osvaldo Villalba September 23 for the kidnapping (and post-ransom release) of former Tacuati mayor and wealthy rancher Luis Alberto Lindstron. Whether politically or just financially motivated, the Lindstron kidnapping has heightened already high tensions in the San Pedro and Concepcion departments, as landless peasant movements -- some of them armed -- appear actively seeking confrontation with "Braziguayo" large-scale landholders. Meanwhile, press reports suggest that Argentina has decided not to extend political asylum to six PPL members being held there pending extradition to Paraguay for previous kidnappings. The issues of unjust land titling and armed violence for political purposes are thus pushing onto the Lugo Administration's agenda -- whether it is ready or not. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Paraguayan authorities indicted former Free Fatherland Party (PPL) members Manuel Cristaldo-Mieres and Osvaldo Villalba September 23 in connection with the kidnapping of rancher and former mayor of Tacuati (San Pedro, Department) Luis Alberto Lindstron. Five subjects kidnapped Lindstron July 31 in Horqueta, Concepcion Department (near the border with San Pedro) and released him September 12 after Lindstron's family paid the kidnappers USD 300,000. Cristaldo Miers and Villalba -- who are still at large -- are also wanted for their alleged roles in the 2004 kidnapping and 2005 murder of Cecilia Cubas, the daughter of former President Raul Cubas Grau (ref A). Prosecutors indicted Cristaldo and Villalba based on testimonies given by Lindstron and his brother, Amado Lindstron, who publicly claimed that he delivered the ransom money to a man he subsequently identified from pictures as Cristaldo Miers.

[1](#)3. (C) The Ultima Hora newspaper reported September 20 that prosecutors believe Cristaldo and Mieres targeted Lindstron as a wealthy rancher. Prosecutor Alejo Vera told the press that the group possesses M-16 rifles, hand grenades, camouflaged uniforms, and rubber boots similar to ones used by the FARC. Prosecutor Sandra Quinonez told the Regional Legal Advisor (RLA) September 22 she was certain that Lindstron's kidnappers also abducted Cubas and Maria Bordon de Debernardi, the wife of a wealthy businessman who was kidnapped in 2001. Quinonez alleged that the kidnappers are former PPL members with proven, historical ties to the FARC based on evidence presented during the Cubas trial. She noted that Lindstron's kidnappers repeatedly invoked a phrase during ransom negotiated used by PPL members who kidnapped Cubas and Debernardi -- "Don't hurt the poor; hurt the rich." She also told RLA that prosecutors confiscated from former PPL members in Tacumbu Prison cellphones and a list of

potential kidnapping victims that included the names of other ranchers in Concepcion and San Pedro departments. Unlike the urban kidnappings pursued by the PPL in years past, Lindstron was not confined in a house or in a single place; he was kept on the move in the countryside throughout his 42 days of captivity. His captors received some level of support from local communities they passed near, and, he concluded, clearly knew the area very well. San Pedro and Concepcion Departments, meanwhile, remain the scenes of heightened tensions over campesino land invasions and threats of armed conflict between various "landless" peasant movements -- some of them now reportedly armed -- and "Braziguayo" largescale land-holders (mostly cattlemen or soy producers) and the police.

14. (S/NF) Post has no evidence that Lindstron's kidnappers maintain any current direct links to the FARC or other foreign revolutionary groups. An e-mail message from Villalba found on FARC leader Raul Reyes' laptop computer indicated that the PPL owed the FARC USD 300,000 for its share of the ransom collected following Debernardi's 2001 kidnapping. Sensitive reporting has not revealed any direct links between former PPL members and the FARC since the 2004 Cecilia Cubas kidnapping. Absent better information on the membership of the two groups, no links have surfaced between the so-called Paraguayan People's Army (EPP), an armed group that vandalized a ranch in Concepcion Department March 12 and is said to be formed by former members of the PPL (ref B), and Lindstron's kidnappers. That said, imprisoned former PPL member Carmen Villalba -- and Osvaldo Villalba's sister -- confirmed the existence of the EPP in March and claimed to serve as its "spokesperson," something she has repeated to the media as recently as October 18. However, the EPP has not claimed responsibility for any acts of violence since March, and Lindstron's kidnappers did not ever identify themselves to Lindstron or the public as EPP (or anyone else). The absence of the trumpeting of any such revolutionary self-identification, however, is not proof of its non-existence -- as thousands kidnapped by (or sold to) the FARC or ELN in Colombia can attest. And if Lindstron's brother is to be believed, he did directly pay the ransom to an ex-PPL leader on the run and believed now tied to the amorphous EPP.

15. (C) Coincidentally, Paraguayan media report that Argentina's Interior Minister announced October 10 that Argentina has decided not to grant political asylum to six PPL members currently incarcerated at Marco Paz Prison outside Buenos Aires pursuant to a Paraguayan extradition request. The Argentine Supreme Court reportedly must now confirm the government's decision before the six -- now on hunger strikes -- can be returned to Paraguay.

16. (C) COMMENT: Despite using weapons, clothing, and rhetoric that mimic the FARC, witness testimony and prosecutors' statements thus far suggest Lindstron's kidnappers are operating autonomously. But there is no evidence upon which to conclude that the band has given up armed struggle and are now purely commercial kidnappers. It seems more likely that, like the FARC, PPL remnants are intent -- no matter the long odds -- on using seemingly apolitical kidnappings both to destabilize rural society and to obtain an important revenue stream ultimately destined for promoting revolutionary activity. While any armed group -- political or not -- in rural San Pedro or Concepcion is not now an existential threat to the Lugo government, continuing reports of their presence comes in the midst of rising numbers of campesino land invasions (some of which have led to deaths in police confrontations), heightened fears of kidnappings, new restrictions on land titling, increased anti-Brazilian sentiments -- and the potential for much more of the same. As such, it is an issue the Lugo government cannot afford to ignore. END COMMENT.

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